

TO: Chairman Troy Waymaster  
Members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Chief Darren L McLaughlin, Merriam Police Department and Cancer  
Survivor

RE: SB 255

DATE: March 17, 2020

---

Chairman Waymaster and Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with testimony in support of SB 255.

In February of 2019, I was diagnosed with Stage 4 Burkitts Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. This type of Lymphoma is very aggressive. Caught early, survival rates are reasonably good. Caught late, as mine was, survival rates with traditional chemotherapy treatments are not very high.

My treatment started with the traditional rounds of chemotherapy. After the first round, my tumor shrank. However, after the second round of chemo, my tumor began to grow. My doctor informed my family and I that my survival chances were not good at this point. As you can imagine, we were devastated by this news. Then my doctor started the next sentence with the word, "But". The words that she said after that are the only reason I am standing before you today.

She said, "I am sending you to The University of Kansas Cancer Center to see Dr. McGuirk. They have treatments we do not have here. He has agreed to treat you and is optimistic he can help."

She was right. KU Cancer Center is one of the premiere cancer centers in cancer research and treatments. Dr. McGuirk told me I would be a good candidate for CAR-T treatment. CAR-T is a new treatment option for Lymphoma cancers. CAR-T (chimeric antigen receptors on T-cells) treatment takes immune cells, genetically alters them in a lab to kill cancer cells and then put them back into the body to fight the cancer.

I received my CAR-T treatment in May of 2019. Treatment started with harvesting T-cells from my blood. It took several hours, but the process was not uncomfortable or evasive. I had to wait for the lab to engineer the cells into cancer fighting cells.

My first scan after treatment showed no active cancer. I did have a few minor side effects, but I tolerated them well. I am happy to say I recently had my six-month scan and I am still cancer free. I am close to being fully recovered from the treatment too.

I also believe my recovery had a lot to do with the fact I was able to stay close to home for my treatment. I cannot express in words how important this is to the patient or the patient's family. Our support system was in place. We had others around us to help focus on the day-to-day things we were no longer able to pay attention too. I am grateful every day that my family, friends, co-workers and the community I serve were there to help me and my family through this recovery.

The fact is if I had been diagnosed with this disease in February of 2017, I would not be here to tell my story. It is amazing what people like Dr. McGuirk and institutions like KU Cancer Center are accomplishing. I enjoy talking to Dr. McGuirk about what he sees as the future of this and other new therapies in the future. His, and the team of doctors at KU Cancer Center, passion and dedication for finding new cancer cures makes me excited for what is to come.

We should be proud that we have such a pioneering institution in our state and very thankful. I know I am.

Thank you for letting me share my story.

Chief Darren L McLaughlin

Merriam Police Department